SEMI-LEXICALITY AND THE SYNTAX OF PSEUDOPARTITIVES

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1. GOALS AND BACKGROUND: Pseudopartitives have been frequently addressed in the literature since Selkirk's (1977) seminal study because of their peculiar semantic and syntactic behaviour. The most widely accepted account posits that the N1 is semi-lexical, possessing properties of both lexical and functional categories (Van Riemsdijk 1998, Stavrou 2003, Alexiadou et al. 2007, Tănase-Dogaru 2007 a. o.). However, these studies have not taken into consideration that the semantic classes typically identified display significant semantic and syntactic differences and, most importantly, they have not precisely defined the concept of semi-lexicality.

Focusing on Spanish data, we argue that pseudopartitives undergo a grammaticalization path, and that the N1s on these structures differ on their level of grammaticalization. Some N1s have grammaticalized and are thus functional, while other N1s have not completed the process and are semi-lexical. We assume, following Klockmann (2017) and Cavirani-Pots (2020), that semi-lexicality arises from a transition from the lexical to the functional. On the other hand, we provide a detailed examination of the peculiarities of pseudopartitives regarding verbal agreement, adjectival modification, and combinatory capabilities, amongst other syntactic properties.

2. DISTINGUISHING FUNCTIONAL AND SEMI-LEXICAL N1s. Some of the key observations that we aim to explain for pseudopartitives are the following:

2.1. Verbal agreement: In the semi-lexical configuration, the N1 triggers verbal agreement (1), while plural agreement with the N2 is possible or even preferred when the N1 is functional (2), showing a loss of phi-features as they grammaticalize. Demonte & Pérez-Jiménez (2015, 2017) argue that verbal agreement is semantically motivated. While singular agreement yields a group/atomic reading, plural agreement yields a plural/distributive denotation. However, the data do not support their view, since single-occurrence events are attested with plural agreement (3) and singular agreement is compatible with distributive interpretations (4).

(1)   Un saco de tomates {está/*están} podridos
    a sack of tomatoes are/is   rotten

(2)   a. Un grupo de niños {esperaba/esperaban   su turno
      a   group of children was/   were waiting their turn
    b. Infinidad de niños {??espera/esperaban} su turno
      infinity of children waits/ wait   their turn

(3)   Un montón de niños rompieron esa   mesa
    a lot   of kids broke-PL that table

(4)   a. Un grupo de estudiantes construyeron una casa
      a group of students   build   a   house
    b. Un grupo de niños$_i$ visitó   a   su$_i$ abuela
      a   group of kids   visited DOM their grandmother

2.2. Restrictions on the morphosyntax: Functional N1s can only be preceded by the indefinite determiner *un,-a* (5), while the distribution of semi-lexical N1s parallels that of typical nouns (6). Crucially, a functional N1 can quantify over a semi-lexical N1 (7), showing that they occupy different positions in the syntactic structure.

(5)   a. * dos barbaridades de personas
       two barbarities of people
    b. * mucha exageración de piedras
       a-lot-of exaggeration of stones

(6) dos kilos de arroz / muchas cajas de manzanas
     two kilos of rice / many   boxes of apples
(7) bebe un montón de vasos   de vino
     drinks a lot   of glasses of wine

2.3. Adjectival modification: The pattern illustrated in (8), in which an adjective formally modifying an N1 modifies semantically the N2, is taken as strong evidence of the semi-lexical nature of the N1. The main analysis (Vos, 1999; Stavrou, 2003; Alexiadou et al., 2007) states that the N1, being light in descriptive content, is 'transparent' and thus the adjective can access the N2 through it. Notice that we have found corpus examples of adjectives that are semantically incompatible with the N1 (8b,c): while, syntactically, the availability of an adjective indicates that N1 is an ordinary noun, semantics suggests otherwise.

(8) a. a. un vaso frío de leche
         a   glass cold of milk
         'a cold glass of milk'
     b. un   vaso   espumoso   de cerveza
        a-MASC glass-MASC foamy-MASC of beer
     c. una   taza   espesa   de chocolate
        a-FEM cup-FEM thick-FEM of chocolate

Modification of functional N1s, by contrast, is very restricted. They are only compatible with some prenominal adverbial adjectives (9):

(9) a. Una verdadera/auténtica/absoluta infinidad de mujeres corrieron la maratón
        a   true/real/absolute-FEM   infinity-SG of women-FEM run the marathon
     b. *una   preciosa   barbaridad   de joyas
        a-FEM precious-FEM barbarity-FEM of jewellery-FEM

3. PROPOSAL: All pseudopartitives are headed by the N1, and the N2 is merged as its complement. We argue that there are at least two structures corresponding to the level of grammaticalization. Fully grammaticalized N1s (such as *montón* 'a lot') are degree quantifiers that head a functional projection, located in a high position on the tree, and *de/of* preceding the N2 is not a preposition. There is evidence showing that it is not a case marker either (cf. Doetjes 1997, Martí-Girbau 2010, a.o.). For instance, *de* also appears in non-nominal contexts, and there is a correlation in Romance between the presence of *de* and the absence of agreement on the Q (see Doetjes 2007 based on French data), hence we defend that it is a linker that marks dependency (Philip 2012).

As for semi-lexical nouns, they display properties of mensural classifiers of classifier languages, such as the requirement of semantic compatibility with the N2 or the possibility to be modified by adjectives (Zhang 2013). When these elements are inserted as the head of a Unit Phrase (Svenonius 2007), they are not referential and may have a different meaning than when they are inserted in a NP/DP (for example the N1s *pellizco* or *pinch*). Roots are not specified for semi-lexicality, but they can be inserted in semi-lexical contexts (Cavirani-Pots 2020).

SEL. REFERENCES: Cavirani-Pots, C. (2020) *Roots in progress: semi-lexicality in the Dutch and Afrikaans verbal domain*. Ph.D diss., KU Leuven. **J. S. Doetjes, J. S.** (1997) *Quantifiers and Selection: on the distribution of quantifying expressions in French, Dutch and English*. Holland Academic Graphics, Leiden. **Philip, J.N. (2012)** *Subordinating and Coordinating Linkers*. Ph.D. diss., University College London. **Stavrou, M. (2003)** 'Semi-lexical nouns, classifiers, and the interpretation(s) of the pseudopartitive construction'. In Coene and D'Hulst (eds.): 329-353. **Svenonius, P. (2007)** 'The position of adjectives and other phrasal modifiers in the decomposition of DP'. In McNally, L. and Kennedy, C. (eds.): 16-42. **Vos, R. (1999)** *A Grammar of Partitive Constructions*. Ph.D. diss., University of Tilburg.